

**Center for Media Study, University of Buffalo**  
**Pamela Susan Hawkins, 1998**

Chronology 1972-1977 Pamela Susan Hawkins

*Mediascope Buffalo: The Moving Image In and Around Buffalo 1970-1985* Marguerite W. Knowles excerpt (1996)

*Survey of Film/Television/Video/Still Photography/Electronic Music Activity at State University of New York Campuses.* John Minkowsky. 1977

- Description of Program
- Relationship between Media Study/Buffalo and the Center for Media Study

**Chronology 1972-1977**

-Pamela Susan Hawkins

Center for Media Study, University of Buffalo

“The Center for Media Study provides coursework, research and service in both the making and the interpretation of media. The degrees are centered on composing and understanding the codes of three image-making technologies: film, video and computer, and the curriculum locates these activities within the context of the changing materials, processes and systems within these technologies; within contemporary developments in their creative and critical practice; and within the evolution of human culture and its developing codes of communication.”

-State University of New York at Buffalo Media Study. Undated publication, c 1981.

Dr. Gerald O’Grady initiated and in 1972 founded the Center for Media Study at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Under Dr. O’Grady’s leadership, “an extraordinary group of experimental artist/makers were attracted to the Center for Media Study. Their imprint on media development has nurtured the growth of a proactive group of independent makers and media scholars who have been involved in the mainstream of experimental work both in Buffalo and world-wide, artists actively creating avant garde works, exhibiting, publishing and teaching in major institutions.

“In the heyday of support [1970’s] from the New York State Council on the Arts and Humanities and Education Department, and the federal programs, the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities and the U.S. Information Agency, funding was attracted to Western New York for an amazing array of programs, many at the Center for Media Study at UB and at Media Study/Buffalo. Some particularly compelling programs from the 70s and 80s include:

**1972-1979**

*Summer Institute in the Making, Knowing and Judging of Film/Media*

Supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, Public Media Program (14 courses, 200 participants each summer) at SUNY at Buffalo.

**1972-1973**

Gerald O’Grady, Director of CMS, began the *Oral History of the Independent American Cinema*, during the 1972-73 academic year. Three filmmakers – Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka and Hollis Frampton - were invited to interview five fellow filmmakers. Ian Hugo, Sidney Peterson, Larry Jordan, Kenneth Anger, James Broughton and Peter Kubelka were interviewed by Brakhage. Jack Smith, Jonas Mekas, Robert Breer and Stan Brakhage were interviewed by Kubelka. Frampton interviewed Michael Snow, Andrew Noren, Paul Sharits and Bruce Connor. In the Summer of 1973 James Blue began a set of interviews with Frederick Wiseman, George Stoney, Donn Alan Pennebaker and Willard Van Dyke.

*Conference on Teaching Making*

December 11-17, 1973 (30 film and video makers, 10 representatives of grant -giving organizations, 8 days conference, 1 day seminar) SUNY at Buffalo, Media Study/Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

*Women in Film & Video*

February 16-18, 1974 (12 film & video makers, 3 theorists), SUNY at Buffalo.

**1975-1977**

*American Seminar in Film*

Nine 3-day seminars with faculty and graduate students from Harvard, New York University and SUNY at Buffalo in addition to distinguished scholars, filmmakers and guests, 1975-1977; supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**1976-1990**

*New York State Summer School of Media Arts*

Supported by the Alternative Education Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, and New York State Education Department, the program provided a six-week intensive program of workshops in film, video, photography, creative sound, computer arts and holography for up to 75 of the most talented youth in New York State at SUNY at Buffalo.

**1977**

*Design/Electronic Arts Conference*

March 10-13, 1977 (32 speakers/artists, 160 guests), supported by the Center for Media Study/SUNY at Buffalo and Media Study/Buffalo, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts; at Marine Midland Center and Ellicott Square Building, Buffalo.

*Faculty*

Included Woody Vasulka, Steina Vasulka, Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton, Tony Conrad, Brian Henderson and James Blue. The program offered BA, MA, MFA and PhD degrees and operated on three levels: making in a variety of media including film, video, holography and computers; history and interpretation of imagery; the psychological and social impacts of image and media. The Center for Media Study also offered a summer program, "Summer Institute for Making and Understanding Media", which provided 7 week courses taught by visiting teachers and artists, a conference and many outside speakers.

**1978**

*Contemporary Directions in the Public Affairs Documentary*

February 22-25, 1978 (23 speakers, 15 film and videotapes, 250 guests) sponsored by the Center for Media Study, SUNY at Buffalo, WNED-Channel 17, and Media Study/Buffalo; supported by the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. (1)

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*Mediascope Buffalo: The Moving Image In and Around Buffalo 1970-1985* excerpt  
-Marguerite W. Knowles

"Some of us revel in memories of intellectual excitement engendered by the independent media developments that Gerald O'Grady brought to Buffalo in the 70s. Like a stone tossed into Lake Erie, the ripples have continued to spread and today there is an ever expanding, burgeoning stream of media artists trained in Buffalo, creating, exploring, transforming and expanding the parameters of media art. The Western New York community has been on the cutting edge of the new media movement and Buffalo is arguably one of the most media literate communities in America.

Dr. O'Grady came to the University at Buffalo in 1967 as a medieval specialist in the Department of English. He had become interested while at Rice University in Texas with the new media as a code of communication; at UB he was the initiator and Director of the Center for Media Study in 1972, and he founded the not-for-profit media center, Media Study/Buffalo. His concept of the wide-ranging effects and possibilities for the 'new media' was universal in scope, presciently forecasting that with the advent of film, video and television cameras, broadcast industries and computer technologies there was to be a dramatic change in the way people throughout the world would receive information, do business and communicate with each other. He was particularly sensitive to the need for artists to be supported and to work with the advanced thinkers of the scientific communities to encourage cross-fertilization of ideas that would enable the flourishing of the new art forms. It was a given that the new technologies would restructure the ways urban and global societies would interact and influence each other. His mission was the preparation of artists and teachers of media whose mode of personal expression would grow from a cross-disciplinary base of general education, and further, to bring to the public an awareness and understanding of a new era of media history.

An extraordinary group of experimental artist/makers were attracted to the Center for Media Study at UB; Paul Sharits (film), Hollis Frampton (film/photography), Tony Conrad (film/video), Steina and Woody Vasulka (digital arts), James Blue (documentary film); and film historian/theorist, Brian Henderson."

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#### University Center at Buffalo Program

The Center for Media Study currently offers courses in film and video making and interpretation, in its development of "three areas of coursework which will lead to undergraduate and graduate degrees: 1) the making of films, videotapes and other media; 2) the history, theory and analysis of media forms; 3) the psychic and social effects of media." Gerald O'Grady, the Program's Director since its inception in 1972, defines the Center's philosophy in the following way: "Media mean all of the symbolic codes of human culture, and their study involves all of the ways in which they interact with and influence each other in constructing human consciousness. The informing insight of the Program is that all citizens should have an understanding of and access to all of the codes of expression, communication and information-transfer of the culture in which they live."

The other full-time faculty-Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Bohuslav Vasulka, Brian Henderson and James Blue-and one teaching assistant offer about twelve undergraduate and six graduate courses in filmmaking, history and analysis and four courses in videomaking and theories of electronic media each year to over three hundred undergraduate and about sixty-five graduate students. The Program is open to double majors, joint majors and a variety of ad-hoc majors with departments concentrating on other codes, and awards approximately ten undergraduate degrees to "Special Majors" and a dozen Master of Arts in Humanities degrees each year, as well as directing film dissertations by PhD. candidates in the English and French Departments. Over four hundred independent, documentary and feature narrative films and one hundred and fifty experimental videotapes are screened in the Program's courses each year.

Facilities in film include super-8 and 16mm production and projection equipment, full 16mm editing facilities, an optical printer, and sophisticated 16mm sound-sync equipment, including synchronizer, double system interlock projector and a recorder/reproducer for 16mm edge track. Center for Media Study also has the use of the permanent 35mm projection facilities at University Center at Buffalo. Video facilities in the Center's Experimental Video Laboratory include black-and-white cameras, 1/2-inch and 3/4-inch color editing decks, special effects generator/ switcher, colorizer,

synthesizer, color video projector and sophisticated electronic and test equipment.

Seeing itself as a catalyst, helping to define and advance the new field of Media Study, the Center for Media Study has been active in sponsoring or co-sponsoring five consecutive Summer Institutes in the Making and Understanding of Film/Media ‘ numerous regional, national and international conferences (on Teaching Resources in Film and Media, Autobiography in the Independent American Cinema, Teaching Making, Women in Film and Video, Electronic Arts), over fifty visiting lecturers on film and the electronic arts yearly and series of recent Chinese, Polish, Soviet and Egyptian films. As part of a major research project of the Center, the Oral History of the Independent American Film, more than five hundred hours of interviews with fifty independent filmmakers have been recorded which, along with an expanding collection of films, experimental videotapes and printed materials, comprise the Center’s research resources.

Center for Media Study has submitted a “Letter of Intent” to offer A.B., M.A., M.F.A. and PhD. degrees. As part of its function as a dynamic and integrative agent “which would interact with many other departments and units in the University and the community,” the Program has plans to make joint appointments with other faculties and to develop curricula with the Department of Instruction in the School of Education to prepare media teachers for elementary and high schools, and with departments in the social sciences to establish programs in cultural documentation and investigation. Present needs are an increase in faculty and personnel, graduate lines for fellowships, teaching assistants and research assistants as well as more equipment and dedicated space.

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#### Relationship between Media Study/Buffalo and the Center for Media Study

A not-for-profit private foundation, Media Study/Buffalo, directed by Gerald O’Grady, offers workshops in film, photography and the electronic arts, film and video screenings and access to equipment to interested community members, among them students at a number of State University of New York campuses. Students use the facilities not for activity related to courses or extra-academic university events, but as citizens or residents of the state who are committed to the serious exploration of video. Media Study/Buffalo also co-sponsors a variety of screenings and events with Center for Media Study, U.U.A.B. Film Committee, The Educational Communications Center and other departments and organizations at University Center at Buffalo, as well as other cultural groups and institutions in Western New York, such as the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

1. Marguerite W. Knowles, “Mediascope Buffalo: The Moving Image in and around Buffalo 1970-1995,” *The Squealer*, vol. 11, issue 2, Spring 1996, pg.7-8.
2. Center for Media Study, University of Buffalo brochures
3. Survey of Film/Television/Video/Still Photography/Electronic Music Activity at State University of New York Campuses. John Minkowski. 1977